



## Paging Rep. Foley

### Closeted member's scandal threatens to engulf the House GOP caucus

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by Eric Resnick

**Washington, D.C.**--An influential GOP House member long known to be a closeted gay man resigned in disgrace last week, after e-mails and sexually explicit instant messages with minors surfaced.

Rep. Mark Foley, a Republican representing Florida's 16th congressional district, stretching from Port Charlotte to Palm Beach since 1995, resigned September 29 after it was learned that he had been sending suggestive and seductive messages to male congressional pages.

Congressional pages are high school students, age 16-17, who spend a year on Capitol Hill working as messengers.

It has been reported since 1996 in all but the national media that Foley is gay but closeted. But his interactions with underage pages are a new development.

Since his resignation, former pages are coming forward with reports that Foley made them uncomfortable with similar advances over the years. The episode has become a major scandal, including investigations by the FBI and calls for House Speaker Dennis Hastert to resign.

Foley, 53, was moderate on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in Congress, and has been endorsed by the Human Rights Campaign and Log Cabin Republicans. He was also a major fundraiser for Republican House members.

The *Advocate* outed Foley in 1996 following his vote for the federal "defense of marriage act."

Citing that article, the weekly Broward-Palm Beach *New Times* outed him to Floridians in 2003, ending Foley's bid for a U.S. Senate seat. Foley called a press conference at the time to denounce the "rumors," but would not say what they were.

"The Republican U.S. representative out of Lake Worth is gay. That is no revelation to political and media types," wrote the *New Times* three years ago. "Everyone knows it, though no newspaper outside the gay press has ever really touched the issue."

Until last week, when ABC News released an instant message log between a 16-year-old page and Foley, using the screen name "Maf54."

Foley was in a Pensacola hotel room on a campaign trip in the spring of 2003.

Foley: "how my favorite young stud doing"

Page: "tired and sore . . ."

Foley: "from what"

Page: "from waltzing . . . im sore from waltzing"

Foley: "tahts good you need a massage"

The exchange continues later with the young man talking about playing lacrosse.

Page: "ugh tomorrow i have the first day of lacrosse practice"

Foley: "love to watch that those great legs running"

Page: "haha . . . they arent great thats why we have conditioning 2 days running . . . three days lifting every week until the end of march"

Foley: "well dont ruin my mental picture"

Page: "oh lol . . . sorry"

Foley: "nice youll be way hot then" Page: "haha . . . hopefully"

Foley: "better be"

The transcript continues with Foley asking the page, "did any girl give you a haand job this weekend."

The page responds that he is "single right now," to which Foley replies, "good so your getting horny . . . did you spank it this weekend yourself."

Foley presses the page to describe a masturbation technique, which he clearly enjoys visualizing.

Foley: "well I have aa totally stiff wood now"

Foley: "is your little guy limp . . . or growing"

"Get a ruler and measure it for me," Foley wrote, continuing the 52-minute conversation until the page announced his mother was calling, and he had homework to finish.

Other similarly graphic transcripts have surfaced since, from other pages who have sent them to ABC News, including one with a teen Foley spent time with in San Diego and was apparently trying to set up a dinner date with.

Florida law makes sexual conduct between an adult age 24 and older and a minor 16 or 17 years old a second-degree felony. Conversation designed to sexually arouse a minor is less clearly defined.

However, Foley--who sharply criticized President Clinton for his affair with 22-year-old Monica Lewinsky--pushed to pass the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act last summer.

Foley's law criminalizes sexual solicitation of minors over the Internet. The state law requires sexual contact.

The FBI is investigating to see if Foley violated his own law.

The story has gotten much attention because it calls into question the competency of Republican House leadership close to election time.

Foley chaired the Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus. He had also been investigated for an e-mail exchange with a page in 2005 by the House Page Board, and ordered by the board to "cease all contact" with the boy.

Documents are surfacing that show warnings passed between pages since 2001 to "watch out for Congressman Foley." The *Washington Post* and *New York Times* have also reported that in the spring of 2006, newly appointed House Majority Leader John Boehner of West Chester, Ohio, learned of "inappropriate contact" between Foley and a young page and told Hastert about it. Boehner later called the papers to retract those statements.

The conservative *Washington Times*, however, called for Hastert's resignation on October 3.

Foley's "behavior was an open secret among the pages who were his prey," said the *Times*.

"The matter wasn't pursued aggressively. It was barely pursued at all. Moreover, all available evidence suggests that the Republican leadership did not share anything related to this matter with any Democrat," continued the *Times*.

For damage control, "family values" groups, who generally promote Republicans, are spinning the matter into an attack on LGBT equality.

"This is the end result of a society that rejects sexual restraints in the name of diversity," said Family Research Council president Tony Perkins. "We need public policy in our country that protects marriage, respects parental authority and aggressively polices boundaries around our children."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, whose 1994 ascent to the post brought Foley into the House on a national "family values" platform, defended GOP leadership inaction on *Fox News Sunday* opining, "Had they overly aggressively reacted to the initial round, they would also have been accused of gay bashing."

**National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director Matt Foreman shot back at Gingrich, saying, "It's absurd given that Republican House leadership has never shied away from bashing gay people. Their legislative record and rhetoric are replete with examples of bashing gay people."**

**"Cut me a break," Foreman said.**

**"What's clear is that the House leadership elevated holding onto a seat above the interests of young people in the page system," Foreman continued. "And they want to talk about 'moral values?' Please."**

**“It’s a cover up,” Foreman said, “an unwillingness to act when the allegations came out.”**

**“The page system has many prior instances involving male members and female pages, Foreman added. “It’s absurd to make this about being gay, closeted or not. What happened here might be illegal regardless of whether it’s gay or straight.”**

Gay blogger Mike Rogers, who has been reporting on Foley since March 2003, told the *Miami Herald*, “I do believe that he had unhealthy sexual advances to these guys because he was living his life as a closeted gay man. Healthy gay men who are mature and dealing with their sexuality in a mature way don’t hit on kids who are 16 years old.”

Over the weekend, Foley, according to his attorney David Roth, checked himself into a facility for alcoholism treatment.

Roth said at a Tuesday press conference that Foley had been molested by a clergyman as a young teen. He stressed that Foley never had any sexual contact with minors.

Roth added that Foley wished to say, for the first time publicly, that he is gay.

It is too late to remove Foley’s name from the November ballot. The Florida Republican Party has chosen State Rep. Joe Negron to run against Democrat Tim Mahoney for the now open seat. Votes for Foley will automatically go to Negron.

Two House members were censured for having sex with 17-year-old pages in 1983. Democrat Gerry Studds of Massachusetts was outed over an affair with a male page, making him the first openly gay member of Congress. Illinois Republican Daniel Crane’s affair was with a girl. Crane resigned, but Studds kept his seat and was re-elected, serving until 1996.